

Book Reviews

Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History: Essays in Honor of Amalia Levanoni, edited by Yuval Ben-Bassat (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Pp. XXVII + 414. (Islamic History and Civilization, 143)

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This festschrift is well deserved. Amalia Levanoni, emerita for Middle Eastern History at the University of Haifa, not only developed many new perspectives in Middle Eastern history, but has left a considerable mark on Mamluk studies and continues to do so. Her *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)* from 1995 (the tenth volume of the Brill series in which this festschrift now appears as volume 143) revealed a new perspective on the reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, which had previously been perceived in the scholarship as the heyday of Mamluk rule. Levanoni showed that many developments which would haunt the Mamluk realm in the second half of the century were apparently set in motion by the policies of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

Her contributions to the field are highlighted in a *laudatio* by Michael Winter, her dear, long-time colleague from Tel Aviv, who sadly passed away this year. He will be remembered by many in the field for his own contributions as well as for his collaborations with Levanoni.

The present festschrift was assembled by Yuval Ben-Bassat, who is Senior Lecturer in Ottoman and Turkish History at the University of Haifa. Despite not being a Mamlukist himself, he organized the work of the contributors convincingly in five parts that reflect Levanoni's areas of expertise.

Part 1 deals with social and cultural issues and contains five contributions. In the first of these, Carl F. Petry shares his “criminal” insights based on his wide-ranging expertise on narrative sources. The cases he presents here lead him to conclude that elite status could sometimes be used in order to transgress shari‘ah regulations. He especially shows this for alcohol consumption and abusive behavior toward subjects. Koby Yosef follows with a long and very detailed article on kinship terminology in the sultanate. His argument proves to be inspiring as it demystifies the notion of the “Mamluk family” that David Ayalon presented as specifically Mamluk. In scrutinizing the terminology the Mamluks used for kinship he shows that Mamluk usage is in line with the usual practices in other Muslim societies and not so exceptional. Moreover, he traces kinship terminology with actual case studies from the sources, which presents a very welcome contribution to the social history of the Mamluks. The same is true of Limor Yungman's paper, which offers insights by peering into Mamluk pots and pans. Her



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paper deals with Mamluk tastes and offers some recipes as well. Mamluks liked it sweet, which is no surprise for people from the Middle East, but they also insisted, because of their early Central Asian origins, on the consumption of horse meat, which was disliked and criticized by contemporary Arabs. She underlines her source examples convincingly with theoretical approaches from Cultural Studies about taste and food culture. In any case it is still hard to imagine how a Mamluk horse stew or other dishes really smelled and tasted. More research in this area is warmly welcome.

Bernadette Martel-Thoumian presents (in French) the life and fate of Aṣalbāy, the concubine of Qāyṭbāy who would then be the mother, sister, wife, and widow of subsequent sultans and as such a leading female figure of the late Mamluk empire. In fact, she was so important that Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī decided to establish her in Mecca, where she died. This contribution is quite narrative and might have fit better in part 2, which deals with women in the Mamluk sphere. Another missed opportunity is that the author does not compare Aṣalbāy with Qāyṭbāy's wife Fāṭimah bint 'Alī ibn Khaṣṣbak, her long-term rival with a similarly colorful life.

The last paper in this part is presented by Daisuke Igarashi, who sheds light on the office of supreme *ustādār* in the late Mamluk empire. He shows the function of this office in the financial administration and demonstrates through an analysis of the actual officeholders that they were drawn from the military and the learned elite alike, and that the mix between these two groups in office seems to have been oriented according to competency, i.e., people were chosen because of their qualifications.

In Part 2 three papers deal with the role of women in Mamluk times. Yaacov Lev writes about women in the urban space and reports that they were usually separated according to social class. Poor women had to work outside whereas life was more restricted for middle- and upper-class women, who would stay in the home with their larger families. Despite the constant repetition of rules on "correct" female behavior, it could be seen that the reality was actually different. Yehoshua Frenkel follows with a paper on slave girls and learned teachers, which provides glimpses into the lives of slave girls. The interactions between these women and legal wives could have been explained further, and it is not that clear what is meant by "learned teachers," as some of the examples presented as pious and religious teachers are enslaved women as well. The last point in this section of the book is made by Boaz Shoshan, who looks at marriage and divorce practices in Damascus using Ibn Ṭawq's diary. In reading these stories of ongoing divorces and (re-)marriages one gets the impression that medieval Mamluk daily life was, in terms of conjugal matters, much nearer to contemporary patchwork practices than to pre-modern Europe.



Part 3 is more diverse in its subject matter. Li Guo works on a colloquial poem which apparently provoked a falling-out between Amir Yalbughā al-ʿUmarī (d. 1366) and Sultan Ḥasan, a breach that did not go well for the sultan in the long run. Apparently, artists insulted Yalbughā during a presentation at court and the sultan laughed out loud, offending Yalbughā deeply. While it is not clear whether this incident really happened as described, Guo explores an increase of mockery in poetry and the diverse poetic forms in Mamluk literature, and argues for the increased use of poems in the reconstruction of Mamluk history.

Frédéric Bauden describes in his *Maqriziana XIII* an exchange of letters between al-Qalqashandī and al-Maqrizī about formal questions in diplomatic writings that can be found in a manuscript of al-Qalqashandī's son. It is quite fascinating to see two such eminent scholars writing letters in which they try to outdo and impress each other in their use of terminology and vocabulary, whether out of actual competitiveness or just for the sake of fun. Bauden says that much more information remains to be discovered in these literary encounters between scholars than has so far been recognized.

The late Michael Winter impresses with a contribution on Evliya Çelebi's (d. ca.1095/1684) fictitious story of Sultan Selīm in Egypt during the conquest in 1517. Interesting in this context are the mythological dreams that, according to this author, the Ottoman sultan has in Cairo. The article gives insight into Ottoman storytelling, which actually resembles, to a certain extent, twenty-first-century Turkish and Arab television series about the Ottoman conquest into Arab lands. Evliya Çelebi might therefore be seen as a sort of pre-modern fantasy author. It seems that everyday life of the period was marked by these myths and stories and some decisions made by rulers might have been based on them.

Part 4 looks at material culture. Warren Schultz opens the discussion with a look at coinage and shows special specimens. A vital finding is that some titles on coins were only used for limited times. Schultz raises the question of whether they were cast for specific events. In general, he argues that a single coin might not tell us much, but in combination with other sources and new lines of analysis, like a new look at *laqabs*, this might change the picture. Hana Taragan then looks at the use of Crusader *spolia* in Jerusalem and shows how they were even used into Ottoman times to continue to reflect the great victory of Islam against Christianity. She sees one case in point for this in the free-standing mausoleum (*turbah*) of ʿAlāʾ al-Din Aydughdī al-Kubakī, situated on the eastern side of the Mamilla Cemetery outside the Old City.

Bethany Walker follows with an examination of the water culture of Syria. She uses archaeological evidence to show how the rural population was dependent on water at the time. She also undertakes an investigation of the question of whether contemporary manuals on agriculture were in practice useful for man-



aging water resources in Syria, especially when it was confronted with recurrent droughts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Élise Franssen examines book culture by analyzing a book that consisted of a collection of different religious manuscripts. The manuscript, which is currently at the University of Liège, was copied at the request of the amir Taghrī Barmish. With the help of this book she then attempts to reconstruct the intellectual and religious interests of an ordinary Mamluk officer.

In Part 5, on regional and local politics, Reuven Amitai shows the role of post-Crusader Acre and argues that there was considerable activity there during the Mamluk period despite its being destroyed after the expulsion of the Crusaders in 1291. He supports his argument with construction evidence, like the building of a tower in Acre. I do not think, however, that Acre's role as a regional trade center should be overemphasized. It functioned as a harbor for Jerusalem and the hinterlands, but it did not constitute the thriving, well-fortified center it had been during Crusader times.

The final contribution is by Joseph Drory, who tells the colorful history of the career of ʿAṣṣamūr Ḥummuṣ Akḥḍar, whose nickname had to do with the fact that he liked green chickpeas. Drory presents his life as an example of the *cursus honorum* until he finally fell into disgrace and was killed by the sultan in 1342.

Overall, this is a very sound festschrift for Amalia Levanoni, and the selection of authors and articles reflects her scholarly personality well. It represents many aspects of the variety and the state of the art of Mamluk Studies and should therefore be very interesting to the readers of *Mamlūk Studies Review*.

